

## Tribute to Roy – Linda Murphy

I first met Roy in 1980 when Pat and I went along to a Society meeting after seeing an ad. in the local paper. At that time meetings were held in Rectory Cottages, Bletchley. There were half a dozen people at the meeting, (all men!) one of whom was Roy, who was very welcoming to us newcomers. Meetings in those days mainly concerned scrutiny of Development Corporation plans and their effect on the flora and fauna of the area. It was immediately apparent that Roy was an excellent botanist who spent a lot of his spare time surveying areas of the new city.

As the Society grew and the programme became more formalised (speakers/indoor meetings in the winter and outdoor meetings in the summer), it also became apparent how well connected and well-regarded Roy was. He organised the programme for some years, drawing on his contacts to ensure a range of interesting and very informative talks on a range of species/habitats, not just plants! After taking over the role of President in 1992, Roy presented an annual 'President's Evening' when he was able to give free rein to his botanical interests, I remember talks on specific plant groups, different routes to pollination, fruits and seeds and on the 'anatomy' of plants. Once or twice, he combined his love of plants with another great interest, music, specifically the floral aspects of Gilbert and Sullivan operas! I think some members urged him to stick to plants in the future!

My strongest memories of Roy are from the outdoor meetings. He was always happy to point out and identify flowers as we explored different sites around Milton Keynes. He had infinite patience as we asked about the same plants week after week! I learned a lot about how to look at plants and where/how they grow and to look out for them all the time. It's a habit I've continued to this day whenever I'm out for a walk. He was full of tips and amusing handy hints to help would-be botanists remember and recognise species, such as 'Molly with the hairy knees' for the grass *Holcus mollis* as opposed to the 'pink socks' of *Holcus lanatus*. Or there was the 'Liberace plant' that looked a bit like the candelabra on the celebrity pianist's piano - a rather dated image now and that one was less successful as although I remember that name, I've forgotten what the plant was! But I also learned to be wary.... After being encouraged to 'sniff this' or 'taste that' I soon understood that a diagnostic feature may be a revolting smell (e.g Hedge Woundwort) or very sharp taste (e.g. Biting Stonecrop)! So I also learned the importance of scents, of rubbing leaves between your fingers and so on. I and others were amazed to learn that Roy was red-green colour blind. When I asked him about how he could manage to identify plants so well, when most of us are relying on these colours he just said that he saw different shades of grey and worked from that!

When we visited sites around MK, Roy was always recording what he saw. He had his 'trademark' clipboard with a cover to keep the list dry. He often arrived with a long handwritten list from a previous visit and ticked off what he found, checking it was still there. He encouraged us to contribute to that process, calling out what we'd found, making a list or drawing his attention to something 'different' even if we had no idea what it was. It all

helped maintain a current picture of the Flora of Milton Keynes. On occasions, meetings were held in churchyards as Roy spent quite a lot of time completing a survey of the flora of all the churchyards in Buckinghamshire. He was delighted to show us what he'd found, and we could make a little contribution by keeping our eyes peeled for anything to add to the list. Ever since, I've taken a notebook out with me and made a list of plants seen whenever we visit a site. Roy wasn't just keen to record plants, he was keen to encourage members to observe and record whatever they could and set up a 'Tetrad' project to draw together records from members of whatever species of plants or animals they found in their local patch. He always reminded us that recording the common species is every bit as important as the rarities. Otherwise, we may not notice until it has disappeared altogether.

I will remember Roy as a skilful teacher, a brilliant botanist and a wonderfully kind and humorous friend, whose influence lives on in MKNHS and its members. Roy inspired interest and his enthusiasm was infectious. He taught me and many others so much about plants in the natural world and his patient good humour made it easy to ask questions – a great model to aspire to. Thank you, Roy!

***Linda Murphy***

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